NATIONAL FOOD FORTIFICATION

WORKSHOP REPORT

March 22 - 23, 2017

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Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous medicine
In collaboration with
World Food Programme
Food Fortification Initiative

Executive Summary

Despite several evidence-based interventions, Sri Lanka continues to face a substantial challenge in combating and controlling micronutrient deficiencies (MNDs), particularly iron deficiency anaemia. It is largely prevalent among pregnant women, adolescent girls and young children, with over half the population are estimated to be affected by anaemia. Despite the government implementing various interventions in the recent past, there has been stagnation in the reduction of the prevalence of MNDs.

Increasing the micronutrient density of food through fortification has great potential to improve the daily intake of essential vitamins and minerals for the general population and addressing widespread micronutrient deficiencies. At the Copenhagen Consensus in 2008, food fortification was ranked as one of the top three international development priorities and as one of the most cost-effective strategies to reduce micronutrient deficiencies. However, it is a medium-term strategy and does not replace the need to promote dietary diversity and provide supplements.

Sri Lanka has had a long experience with food fortification, beginning with the mandatory iodization of salt as passed under the Food Act of 1995. However, despite various meetings and debates over the last decades, limited actions have taken place to introduce mandatory fortification of other key staple foods, including rice and wheat. Both are vehicles of high potential as they are consumed in adequate and predictable amounts, affordable, palatable, and culturally acceptable.

To take stock of all the achievements and bottlenecks to regularize and determine the way forward for rice and wheat flour fortification, the Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine (MoH) held a national workshop on food fortification on 22-23 March 2017. It was widely agreed by over 100 multi-sector participants that concrete actions are needed to realize the vision of taking food fortification at scale.

The group work operated in three phases: the first phase was the identification of an appropriate delivery option; phase 2 consisted of the agreement on programme components necessary for selected delivery options; and phase 3 consisted of the identification of necessary actions for the implementation of selected delivery options by programme components.

The groups agreed that although fortification of rice has a high potential to reach a large segment of the population, there are several challenges associated with it and hence mandatory fortification may not be feasible at this stage. Therefore, the best alternative is to introduce it under existing social safety net programmes. On the other hand, it was agreed that wheat flour fortification could be made mandatory as wheat flour production is only handled by two producers. It was noted that a large hurdle in fortification is the consumer acceptance of fortified foods since many misconceptions exist. Sustained political will is also required to ensure the programme's success to provide public awareness of the nutritional benefits of fortification, and to monitor and enforce implementation.

Regional experience in both India and Bangladesh recognize that pursuing a multi-stakeholder strategy is an efficient way to implement a successful fortification food programme. Sri Lanka should consider restructuring the existing coordination bodies such as the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and Food Fortification Committee to be more inclusive of other stakeholders (NGOs, academia, and the private sector).

As a way forward, advocacy, policy development, standard setting, and its enforcement and monitoring will need to be strengthened. To formalize the process, a cabinet endorsement of the work plan outlined in the report will be sought before to introduce the product to the market.

List of Abbreviations

CSR	Corporate social responsibilityDALYDisability-adjusted life years
ENOH	Environmental, Occupational Health, and Food Safety
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFI	Food Fortification Initiative
FFRC	Food Fortification Resource Center
FSSAI	Food Safety and Standards Authority India
IPHT	Institute of Post-Harvest Technology of Sri Lanka
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MDMS	Midday Meal Scheme
MNDs	micronutrient deficiencies
MoAg	Ministry of Agriculture
MoH	The Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
PPT	Power-Point
RRI	Rice Research Institute
SDG-F	The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Fund
TAG	The Technical Advisory Group
WFP	The World Food Programme

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Acknowledgements

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Fund (SDG-F) funded the Sri Lanka national food fortification workshop. The World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in collaboration with the Government of Sri Lanka are implementing the SDG-F Joint Programme for "Scaling Up Nutrition through a Multi-Sector Approach."

The Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine (MoH) organized the workshop with the support of WFP and the Food Fortification Initiative (FFI) on the 22 and 23 March 2017. The workshop brought together over 100 participants from several national government ministries, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), private sector companies, civil society organizations, academia, and international experts from the region. It served as a platform for stakeholders to discuss and propose cohesive policy recommendations to the government and agree on a country work plan for wheat flour and rice fortification.

The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for food fortification, comprising of Dr L.H.B Denuwara (Director, Nutrition Division), Dr Rasanjalee Hettiarachchi (Director, Nutrition Coordination Division), Dr Renuka Jayatissa (Head, Nutrition Department Medical Research Institute), Dr Rohan Karawita (Director, National Food Promotion Board), and Dr Renuka Silva (Senior Lecturer, Department of Applied Nutrition, Faculty of Livestock, Fisheries & Nutrition. Wayamba University of Sri Lanka), guided the organization and management of the workshop, under the overall support from Dr Lakshman Siyambalagoda (Additional Secretary, MoHr and Chair of the TAG). Dr Erandi Weerasekera (Medical Officer, Nutrition Division and Secretary to TAG) coordinated the workshop organization.

The TAG was supported by Ms. Anusara Singhkumarwong (International Nutrition Officer, WFP), Mr Saman Kalupahana (Nutrition Programme and Policy Officer, WFP), Ms Karen Codling (Executive Officer for Asia-Pacific, FFI) and Ms Becky Tsang (Technical Officer for Asia Pacific, FFI). Facilitators from FFI also presented the global update on food fortification. Dr Renuka Jayatissa in her capacity as an expert on the topic of food fortification also provided extensive support to lead the workshop discussions. Special acknowledgement goes to the late Dr Senarath Mahamithwa, who was the convener of the TAG and the key person in bringing the discussion on rice and wheat flour fortification to the forefront, until his passing in October 2016.

Panel members from MoH, Ministry of Agriculture (MoAg), University of Peradeniya, Rice Research Institute (RRI), and the Institute of Post-Harvest Technology of Sri Lanka (IPHT) shared their knowledge and expertise on the rice landscape in the country and factors to be considered when planning the scale up rice fortification programme. The session was facilitated by Dr Renuka Silva.

To facilitate regional knowledge sharing, participants from India, Ms Smita Makad (Head, Food Fortification Resource Centre (FFRC) India), Ms Ranjana Chopra (Commissioner-cum- Secretary, School & Mass Education Department, Government of Odisha, and India), Ms Shariqua Yunus (Nutrition Officer, WFP India) and Mr Rezaul Karim (WFP Bangladesh) attended the workshop. They presented evidence, current status, and challenges of rice fortification in their respective countries. Ms Katrien Ghoos (Senior Regional Nutrition Advisor, WFP Asia & Pacific Regional Office) also participated and presented the regional overview and progress on rice fortification. The panel on regional experience was moderated by Prof. Chandrani Liyanage (Nutrition consultant – FAO).

A special thanks goes to Mr M. I. M. Rafeek (Secretary, Ministry of National Policy and Economic Affairs), Mr Nalaka Kaluwewa (Senior Additional Secretary to the President), Dr Laxman Siyambalagoda, and Ms Brenda Barton (WFP Country Representative) for their inspiring speeches and support.

Introduction

This workshop was held to develop a national work plan to scale up food fortification, as recommended by the Ministry of Health's appointed TAG for food fortification. MoH, in partnership with WFP and FFI, hosted the two-day workshop in Colombo on 22 – 23 March 2017, bringing together over 100 participants, including leading policymakers, technical experts, industry representatives, and national and international partners (Annex 1). ***Dr Rasanjalee Hettiarachchi (Director, Nutrition Coordination Division)*** in her welcome remarks on both days of the workshop highlighted the opportunity of the workshop to explore how rice and wheat flour fortification can bridge Sri Lanka's micronutrient gap and reduce the high levels of micronutrient malnutrition currently prevalent within the country. She noted the importance of a multi-sectoral approach to scale up the effort to address the issue of micronutrient deficiencies (MNDs) in Sri Lanka.

> *Increasing the micronutrient density of food through fortification has a great potential to improve the daily intake of essential vitamins and minerals for the general population, thereby addressing widespread micronutrient deficiencies'. – Dr L. Syambalagoda*

MNDs is a substantial challenge for many countries in the developing world and has become the main risk factor for many diseases and constrained development, which in turn leads to decreased physical and cognitive performance and increased risk of morbidity and mortality amongst children . MNDs affect all age groups, but are particularly detrimental for young children and women of reproductive age because of high nutrient demands during growth and the prenatal period. The burden of MNDs is high in many developing countries. It has been estimated that iron-deficiency anaemia (IDA), vitamin A deficiency and iodine deficiency are jointly responsible for the loss of 45.5 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) worldwide.

Despite several evidence-based interventions, Sri Lanka continues to face a substantial challenge in combating and controlling MNDs, particularly anaemia. It is largely prevalent among pregnant women, adolescent girls and young children.

In the opening session on the first day of the workshop (22 March), ***Dr Lakshman Syambalagoda (Additional Secretary, MoH and Chair of the TAG)*** highlighted the dire need for fortification of a number of appropriate food vehicles in Sri Lanka, due to the high prevalence of MNDs in the country. However, he noted that there remains significant resistance from various stakeholder groups towards food fortification due to several misconceptions, including the belief that fortified food can cause cancer, which has not been proved with sufficient scientific evidence. He emphasized the need to create a strong atmosphere of understanding towards the potential of food fortification and its safety prior to scaling up a food fortification programme in Sri Lanka.

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